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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

[1](#)1. Mideast

[1](#)2. Iran

Key stories in the media:

HaQaretz reported that PM Benjamin Netanyahu is expected to travel to Washington on May 17 and meet with President Obama on May 18 or [1](#)19. The Jerusalem Post reported that the visit will take place in

Qlate May.Q The Jerusalem Post reported that Deputy FM Danny Ayalon told the newspaper that, despite media reports of disagreements between Israel and American officials over the new government's attitude regarding preconditions for new renewed peace negotiations, Jerusalem has yet to formulate specific positions on these issues. Ayalon told IDF Radio that the government needed at least four more weeks to formulate its diplomatic policy, but that it should be ready by the time PM Netanyahu travels to Washington. Maariv and other media reported that, until his meeting with Obama, Netanyahu will try to avoid holding state meetings with world leaders, in which he will be called upon to voice a position on the matter. Therefore, the PM has already requested that President Shimon Peres stand in for him at the AIPAC conference that is slated to be held at the beginning of May in Washington. Netanyahu, who was scheduled to attend the conference, has postponed his participation. In addition, Netanyahu has received invitations for meetings with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and King Abdullah of Jordan. In these cases too, Netanyahu has asked Peres to meet with the two leaders in his stead, until he decides what foreign policy path he intends to follow.

HaQaretz quoted a senior official in the PM's Bureau as saying that Netanyahu will not make Palestinian recognition of Israel as a Jewish state a condition for renewing negotiations with the PA. "Netanyahu will sit down to negotiate with anyone who wants to without preconditions," the aide said. The recognition of Israel as a Jewish state will still be vital to the peace process despite Netanyahu's clarification that it is not a precondition. HaQaretz quoted one of Netanyahu's aides as saying yesterday. "If the Palestinians do not recognize the Jewish state, this will make progress toward two states for two peoples difficult," the official said. HaQaretz quoted an aide as saying that, in a meeting with Netanyahu, U.S. Special Envoy George Mitchell raised the issue of two states for two peoples. Netanyahu told Mitchell that before he declares support for this principle, he needs to know the Palestinians' intent. Netanyahu noted that in Israel the intention is two nation states, Palestinian and Jewish, but it is not clear this is what the Palestinians want. HaQaretz quoted sources in Netanyahu's bureau as saying that in the talks held by Ehud Olmert and Tzipi Livni with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and negotiator Ahmed Qurei, the Palestinians refused to recognize Israel as a Jewish state. HaQaretz quoted a Netanyahu aide as saying: "This is a fundamental matter, because everyone is demanding two states for two peoples, we need to understand what states they mean, and we want to receive clarifications from the Palestinians on the matter when we meet with them."

Leading media (banner in The Jerusalem Post) reported that, on the eve of the controversial QDurban 20 UN conference on racism, President Obama lashed out at the language of its draft declaration, saying it showed "antagonism toward Israel in ways that were often times completely hypocritical and counterproductive." Explaining the U.S. decision to boycott "with regret," Obama said in Trinidad: "Hopefully, some concrete steps come out of the conference that we can partner with other countries on to actually reduce discrimination around the globe, but this wasn't an opportunity to do it." The Jerusalem Post reported that FM Avigdor Lieberman echoed Obama's remarks, saying that the Qfact that a racist like [Iranian President Mahmoud] Ahmadinejad is the main speaker proves the true aim and nature of the conference." Lieberman added that Israel could not ignore the fact that the Geneva conference was taking place on the eve of Israel's Holocaust Remembrance Day. The media reported that yesterday Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the Netherlands, and Germany added their names to the small but growing list of countries that have opted to boycott the event. Israel Radio reported that yesterday thousands of people have attended the opening of a new Holocaust museum in suburban Chicago, with videotaped remarks by President Obama kicking off the event. Obama said that when school children visit the Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center in Skokie, they'll learn there is no greater obligation than to confront acts of inhumanity. Israel Radio reported that the GOI has decided to recall its Ambassador to Bern for consultations following Ahmadinejad's meeting with Swiss President Hans-Rudolf Merz. HaQaretz reported that Netanyahu met with DM Ehud Barak and FM Avigdor Lieberman yesterday in the Prime Minister's Office to discuss the situation in Gaza and the peace process. Barak emphasized that Israel must present a regional peace initiative of

its own including a framework for progress with the Palestinians, the Syrians and the other Arab nations.

Maariv reported that Dr. Michael Oren, an expert in American politics and the Middle East, is Netanyahu's favorite candidate for the Washington ambassadorship. The newspaper reported that Oren holds right-wing views but that the U.S. Senate's Democratic leaders commend him. Maariv reported that FM Lieberman vetoed Dr. Dore Gold and Zalman Shoval's bids for the position.

The Jerusalem Post quoted Jordan's King Abdullah II as saying on Friday before Jewish leaders in Washington that Arab countries need to take steps to encourage Israel to advance final-status negotiations with the Palestinians.

The media reported that on Friday Palestinian demonstrator Bassem Abu Rahmeh was killed during a protest in the West Bank village of Bil'in, a flash point for confrontations between soldiers and anti-fence protesters. HaQaretz quoted IDF sources as saying that a tear gas canister that killed him was likely fired in violation of orders. On Saturday, a Palestinian man drove his Mercedes into two Israeli policemen checking motorists at a checkpoint outside Jerusalem. The driver was arrested after he told police he targeted the officers. The media reported that two Palestinian terrorists were killed in separate attacks in the West Bank on Friday.

All media quoted Bank of Israel Governor Prof. Stanley Fischer as saying yesterday that the worst of the economic crisis in Israel is still ahead and that one or two large Israeli firms might go bankrupt.

HaQaretz reported that on Saturday Netanyahu announced that he has named former minister Natan Sharansky as his candidate for chairman of the Jewish Agency.

The Jerusalem Post reported that it is launching a weekly edition in New York early this summer - a 48-page tabloid that will be carried in The New York Post every Sunday.

All media highlighted issues related to Israel's Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Memorial Day, which is commemorated tonight and tomorrow.

Makor Rishon-Hatzofe reported that yesterday DM Barak expressed more moderate views than PM Netanyahu and advocated a regional Israeli move that would involve Syria and the Arab world.

HaQaretz reported that FM Lieberman has confirmed Israel's participation in a conference being organized in Moscow on the Middle East, which will take place in a few months.

Leading media reported that PM Benjamin Netanyahu is re-examining the handling of the Gilad Shalit case and will soon remove Ofer Dekel as special negotiator for bringing the abducted soldier back.

HaQaretz reported that the U.S. administration and other foreign governments, including Turkey and a number of European countries, have asked Israel over the past few days to prevent the eviction of Palestinian families who have been living for over 50 years in the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah.

HaQaretz reported that the PA has asked U.S. Special Envoy Mitchell to use America's leverage with the Arab states to convince them to make good on their financial commitments to the PA, to the tune of hundreds of millions of dollars earmarked for rebuilding Gaza. Palestinian PM Salam Fayyad was especially critical of the Saudi government, which pledged the largest amount at the Sharm el-Sheikh donor states' conference earlier this year.

The Jerusalem Post reported that, facing soaring costs and American opposition to the integration of Israeli systems into the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter, the Israel Air Force is renewing specifications of a new and advanced model of the F-15 Eagle, which is claimed to have enhanced stealth capabilities.

HaQaretz cited a World Bank report that is to be published today as saying that the water-supply regime used by Israel and the

Palestinians must be changed. The report notes that an average Israeli gets four times as much water as the average Palestinian, and warns that the PA water system is "nearing catastrophe."

The media reported that Stanford University cancer researcher Ronald Levy received a prestigious award, the QArab Nobel PrizeQ in Saudi Arabia. HaQaretz noted that he and his family -Q his wife is Israeli -Q entered the country with Israeli visas on their passports.

Yediot and Maariv reported that today FM Lieberman will announce the appointment of Yossi Gal as director-general of his ministry. Yediot reported that FM Lieberman has decided to appoint Ismail Khalidi, an Israeli Bedouin who serves in the diplomatic corps, as his political adviser for the Middle East.

Leading media reported that Knesset Speaker Reuven Rivlin (Likud) made a conciliatory visit to the Israeli-Arab city of Umm el-Fahm.

Leading media reported that former PM Ehud OlmertQs health is deteriorating. He recently underwent tests at New YorkQs Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center.

1. Mideast:

Summary:

The independent, left-leaning HaQaretz editorialized: QNext month, when Netanyahu goes to Washington, he will have to join Obama's impressive effort and say to his host clearly: Israel wants peace and is ready for peace now.

Senior op-ed writer Akiva Eldar commented on page one of Ha'aretz: QA cool breeze seems to be blowing from Washington.... Netanyahu understands that he is in no position to present Obama with any conditions.

The Director of the Interdisciplinary Center's Global Research in International Affairs Center, columnist Barry Rubin, wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: QThe [U.S.] administration has yet to make significant direct anti-Israel actions or statements.... The biggest loser from Obama's policy, however, is not Israel but U.S. national interests. Will there come a point when the administration realizes this and changes course?

Dov Weisglass, who was former prime minister Ariel Sharon's top diplomatic advisor, wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: QWhat is done cannot be undone. The principle of two states for two peoples is absolute and concrete. Israel's sudden disavowal, in order to supposedly devise a different plan, does not inspire trust.

Block Quotes:

1. "Peace Now"

The independent, left-leaning HaQaretz editorialized (4/19): QHistory provides very few opportunities to utterly change political realities. It seems such an opportunity has presented itself. U.S. President Barack Obama's peace plan is giving Israel and the entire region a rare chance for real change; it must not be missed. In the plan, whose main points were reported by Akiva Eldar in HaQaretz on Friday, Israel will hold bilateral talks with the Palestinians and Syrians at the same time. It is based on the Saudi peace plan, which offers Israel normalization with the Arab world in exchange for withdrawing from the territories and the establishment of a Palestinian state. The United States, for its part, will offer Israel a security package to include a demilitarization of the territories and the stationing of a multinational force there for a few years. This is Netanyahu's chance to enter the history books; a right-wing prime minister who displays leadership and shows his people and country the way to peace, security and prosperity. We must not fear the plan's great scope and boldness; peace can be achieved with both Syria and the Palestinians. This is not the time

to mention the difficulties that could block the path, it is the time to see the opportunities. So next month, when Netanyahu goes to Washington, he will have to join Obama's impressive effort and say to his host clearly: Israel wants peace and is ready for peace now.

II. "Cool Breeze"

Senior op-ed writer Akiva Eldar commented on page one of Ha'aretz (4/20): QAfter the meeting between American envoy George Mitchell and Benjamin Netanyahu last Thursday, the Prime Minister's spokesmen said Netanyahu had demanded Palestinian recognition of Israel as a Jewish state. Yesterday his bureau said this was not a precondition, but an assessment. Without such recognition progress in talks would be difficult. But won't the refusal of the Palestinians to recognize the unification of Jerusalem block progress, among other sensitive issues? Netanyahu knows that the chances of a Palestinian leader conceding that Israel is the state of the Jewish people are zero. He also knows that recognition of Israel as a Jewish state is a winning card at home even for the Zionist left. But his statement made no impression on Mitchell. Netanyahu has not yet agreed to the concept of a two-state solution.

A cool breeze seems to be blowing from Washington with the invitation of Jordan's King Abdullah as the first Middle Eastern guest to the White House. Netanyahu understands that he is in no position to present Obama with any conditions.

III. "The Confrontation Con Game"

The Director of the Interdisciplinary Center's Global Research in International Affairs Center, columnist Barry Rubin, wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (4/20): QThere are many people eager to see U.S. President Barack Obama and his administration bash Israel, or predict that's already happened. But the administration has yet to make significant direct anti-Israel actions or statements. Despite rumors and speculation, at this point there's still no solid evidence. While, obviously, things could change at any time, I expect this widely predicted conflict isn't going to take place. An extremely important factor here is that in fact the PA and Hamas, not Israel, are the barriers to peace. An Obama presidency would be far more dangerous if there was a PA determined to say anything to get a state, get the U.S. to pressure Israel to massive concessions, and then break its word. The same applies to a Hamas happy to pretend to abandon terrorism

and genocidal rhetoric. But that's not the case. The PA will criticize Israel but offer nothing. It won't provide a moderate alternative program to Hamas, stop incitement, accept resettlement of Palestinian refugees in a Palestinian state, make any territorial concessions, or agree that a two-state solution permanently ends the conflict. And it won't accept Israel as a Jewish state alongside a Palestine which -- according to the PA's own constitution -- is an Arab and Muslim state.... The biggest loser from Obama's policy, however, is not Israel but U.S. national interests. Will there come a point when the administration realizes this and changes course?

IV. "Say It, Mr. Netanyahu"

Dov Weisglass, who was former prime minister Ariel Sharon's top diplomatic advisor, wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (4/20): QWhat is done cannot be undone. The principle of two states for two peoples is absolute and concrete. Israel's sudden disavowal, in order to supposedly devise a different plan, does not inspire trust. Clearly, Netanyahu did not wait until his election to formulate a position on the matter of the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, and the request for an

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extension in order to study the issue is not convincing. It is difficult to understand what kind of foreign policy plan, which does not include the establishment of a Palestinian state, will be acceptable to the Palestinians, the Arab states and the world. Unfortunately, this does not sound serious. Recently, Israel has gone so far as to demand Palestinian recognition of the State of Israel as a Jewish state, as a precondition for continuing the negotiations. Israel is a Jewish state. It is the Jewish state. It does not need the recognition of the Palestinians -- or of any other country. According to the Roadmap, the final status negotiations are to end in the establishment of a Palestinian state,

which must recognize Israel, as Israel has defined itself. It will therefore recognize Israel as the state of the Jews. The demand for recognition now is like creating a problem where none exists. It is neither dignified nor believable.... Netanyahu's government rightfully rejected the Annapolis statement-inasmuch as it purports to deviate from the road map -- but it is incumbent upon it to quickly announce that Israel will implement the road map plan, with all its conditions. Then, among other things, the Palestinian state will exist alongside Israel, which is -- as everyone knows -- the state of the Jews.

12. Iran:

Summary:

Giora Eiland, former Director of the National Security Council, wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: QIsrael will have difficulty living with a situation in which Iran can go, within several months, from being a state that controls nuclear technology to a state that has the bomb.

Block Quotes:

"What It Is Not and What It Is"

Giora Eiland, former Director of the National Security Council, wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (4/19): QThe Iranians believe that they will be able to make a deal with the new U.S. They will continue enriching uranium (supposedly for peaceful purposes), and promise only not to carry out an arms program. Thus, Obama will be able to claim that he succeeded in preventing Ahmadinejad from obtaining nuclear weapons (and indeed, in all his speeches he has announced that this is his goal). Iran, for its part, will receive de-facto recognition of its right to enrich uranium. In this case, even if Iran froze its nuclear-arms plan, it would be able to resume it and create a bomb within several months from that moment. That is precisely the concern. Israel will have difficulty living with a situation in which Iran can go, within several months, from being a state that controls nuclear technology to a state that has the bomb. Therefore, the question that the Prime Minister of Israel should be clarifying in his upcoming meeting with the American President is this: When you claim that you will stop Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons, are you referring, like the previous administration, to stopping it at the stage of enriching uranium, or have you given up on that subject? If Obama promises, as did his predecessor, that he intends to stop Iran from enriching uranium, that will be an important accomplishment. But talk is not enough. He must act immediately and form a coalition with Russia and China (in exchange for painful concessions in other areas). If the administration contents itself with stopping Iran only at the stage of building a bomb, it will resign itself, for all practical purposes, to its ability to become a nuclear power. That is the key question, and it is much more important than the artificial connection that has been made recently between Iranian nuclear capability and an agreement on Qtwo states.

Moreover, if that is the answer, then in 2009 the Israeli government will have to choose between two evils: to get used to a situation in which Iran will have nuclear arms in the end, or to try to prevent that from happening on its own.

CUNNINGHAM